

# ■ PRODUCT LITERATURE CENTERS

**MORE BANG FOR THE MARKETING BUCK**

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Successful participation in the global trade game involves many steps. One of those is making potential overseas buyers aware of your product or service. There are a number of ways that businesses can do this, including posting a catalog on a Web site, engaging in direct mail and marketing campaigns, or exhibiting at an international trade event. But smaller companies seeking new markets (or larger companies wishing to test the receptiveness of a particular market) can benefit from participating in a low-risk, low-cost method of product and catalog display organized by various offices within the Department of Commerce: the Product Literature Center.

## ■ WHAT IS A PLC?

A Product Literature Center, or PLC, typically offers space for a company's promotional and sales material at an international trade fair booth organized by the Department of Commerce and staffed by an industry specialist. Visitors to the booth can take literature with them and, after the show, participating businesses receive sales leads collected by Department of Commerce personnel.

The term "Product Literature Center" was first coined for the 1985 Paris Air Show. For years, small and medium-sized companies had desired a more economical means of displaying their products and services in the international marketplace. But the costs of exhibiting in international trade events, particularly the Paris Air Show, had increased to the point at which smaller companies could no longer afford to rent and staff a booth for the duration of a show.

In response to this situation, the staff of Commerce's Office of Aerospace developed a "Traders Information Center," which displayed and distributed companies' catalogs and forwarded sales leads back to participating companies. The Traders Information Center eventually evolved into the Aerospace Products Literature Center, which featured marketing literature for products, technologies, and services of U.S. aerospace companies.

## ■ A LONG HISTORY

The U.S. Department of Commerce has been offering companies the opportunity to display product literature at overseas locations for decades.

Initially, this method of introducing U.S. products to an overseas audience allowed information to be passed along to potential buyers in remote and sometimes inaccessible markets. In the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. companies were encouraged to send product information to overseas posts where it was made available to foreign buyers. In the pre-Internet era, this was the easiest and most effective way to introduce buyers to sellers.

As business came to focus more on the many industrial trade shows held around the globe, catalog displays became directly linked to an international trade event, specifically targeting a particular industry or geographic buyer. Literature centers are still organized in markets where there is a high degree of interest in U.S. products but not yet an organized trade event.

Literature centers are sponsored both by the U.S. embassy's commercial offices as well as the specific industry office within U.S. Department of Commerce headquarters. The organization of PLCs varies depending on the industry, geographic location, and target audience. For example, CEBit, the largest computer show in Europe,

attracts thousands of visitors and exhibitors, and the Department of Commerce offers a range of services to allow companies to participate at a level appropriate to attracting the right type of buyers for their investment.

Product Literature Centers have become more sophisticated over the years. Some PLCs display actual products, show company videos, and even distribute CD-ROMs. However, the fee to participate remains nominal and there is no booth space to rent. This is the perfect way for a company to have a presence at a show without a representative actually being on site.

#### BENEFITS TO BUYERS AND SELLERS

The benefits of PLCs accrue equally to U.S. sellers, foreign buyers, and trade show organizers. The seller or PLC participant is able to reach a group of potential buyers with a minimum of expense and commitment. In contrast to exhibiting at a stand-alone booth, a participating company has the benefit of displaying under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Commerce. By exhibiting with a group of other companies, a participating business is likely to receive more visitors than if it were displaying individually. The foreign buyers can be assured that exhibiting firms are interested in selling to their specific market and, when contacted, will give them a serious response.

Visitors to a PLC likewise benefit by becoming aware of the products, technologies, and services of U.S. companies. Show organizers benefit in the long run if PLC participants eventually convert to stand-alone exhibitors once they have determined that the market is appropriate for their products or services.

#### MEASURABLE RETURNS

Participating in a Commerce-sponsored PLC will provide your company with a number of advantages:

- **The organizing office will assist you in preparing appropriate marketing material to distribute at the show.** Trade specialists can tell you how to organize your materials and samples effectively to attract the most attention to your product or service.

- **Trade leads are compiled and then forwarded to exhibitors at the conclusion of the show.** During the show, Commerce staff displays the literature of all participants, screens interested parties for relevance, and often has potential buyers fill out a comprehensive questionnaire for the U.S. PLC participant.

- **A PLC directory of participating exhibitors is provided to all visitors, that includes company and marketing information for each participant.** The directory is provided to all PLC visitors and may be distributed to exhibitors and other attendees of the show, as well as displayed in the library at the U.S. embassy where foreign buyers often search for U.S. suppliers.

- **PLCs provide inexpensive exposure for your company under the umbrella of a Commerce-sponsored booth, especially if you do not plan to exhibit at or attend a particular show.** At the same time, PLCs offer a low-cost opportunity to "test" your products or services in a foreign market where your company may not be active. If you plan to exhibit at a show where a PLC is organized, participating in the PLC can provide a useful vehicle for increased market exposure. The PLC staff is willing to direct interested foreign buyers to your booth location on the show floor.

#### CONTACTS AND SALES LEADS

Many show organizers designate visiting days for those who come from the trade and other days for the public.

Trade day visitors are required to document their professional status at the entrance. Commerce Department personnel also verify professional status prior to permitting a visitor to enter the PLC booth and, at some shows, visitors must complete a PLC entry questionnaire. While it cannot be guaranteed that each lead will generate business, success stories ensuing from PLC participation are common.

Typically, participants of a PLC receive between five and 15 qualified trade leads per day of the show. Additionally, many show visitors retain the printed PLC directory for future reference when they look for sources of new products.

#### HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Participation fees for PLCs normally fall between \$300 and \$600 per show, but there is no standard cost. Participation costs can vary depending on the sophistication of the show as well as the industry.

The schedule for PLCs varies. You can access the trade events section of [export.gov](http://export.gov) at the following: [www.export.gov/tradeevents.html](http://www.export.gov/tradeevents.html). Selecting the "Catalog Show" category under the "International Trade Events" link produces a roster of forthcoming PLC events and the trade shows where they are scheduled to take place. ■

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